

LEVEL I

HORNED GREBE

One of six grebe species in North Dakota. A small, duck-like bird, with a straight black bill and white tip, black head, with puffy, yellow ear tufts extending from red eyes to back of the head. A reddish neck and gray back adorn this bird.

Habitat and range: East of the Missouri River, particularly the Turtle Mountains. Uses a variety of wetlands and lakes with open water. Nests on a bed of floating vegetation on open water.

Why: Horned grebes were once more common in North Dakota, found nearly everywhere on prairie wetlands. Draining of wetlands has negatively affected this species.

AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN

The larger of two pelican species in North America, boasting a 9-10-foot wingspan and measuring 6 feet from bill to tail. Flocks often seen flying in a spiral motion.

Habitat and range: Statewide, but primarily Missouri Coteau and drift prairie. Chase Lake National Wildlife Refuge hosts North America's largest nesting colony.

Why: Pelicans are a "responsibility" species as North Dakota is home to a large colony. Pelicans in adjacent states are declining, or vulnerable, and North Dakota may be the last stronghold for the entire population.

AMERICAN BITTERN

An odd-looking, 2-foot-tall bird with nicknames such as "sky-gazer" because, if startled, it stands motionless with its beak pointing upward, and "water belcher" for its *glug-glug* call.

Habitat and range: Primarily east of Missouri River. Bitterns are secretive, hiding in wetland cattails and bulrushes. Nests of dead reeds or cattails are built a few inches above water among cattails. Birds will also nest in uplands.

Why: Loss and destruction of wetlands and prairie habitat, is negatively affecting this species.

SWAINSON'S HAWK

A large hawk, similar in size to common red-tailed hawk, with a wingspan of 50 inches. Although quite variable in plumage color, most sport a white face and dark brown "bib."

Habitat and range: Statewide. The 3-4-foot-wide nests built in lone prairie trees are conspicuous.

Why: Concern may lie with its wintering habitat – grasslands of Argentina – rather than its breeding range. Another worry is humans who kill them because of fear they are preying on too many game animals, rather than their favorite meal of ground squirrels and insects.

FERRUGINOUS HAWK

The largest hawk in North Dakota varies in coloration from almost completely white, with a trace of reddish-brown, to nearly all dark brown. Population size and productivity closely linked to its primary prey of ground squirrels, prairie dogs and jackrabbits.

Habitat and range: Statewide, but appear concentrated in the Missouri Coteau. Birds prefer predominantly native grasslands and shrubland habitat. Often nest on the ground on rocky hillsides.

Why: Population declining due to destruction and alteration of breeding and wintering habitats.

YELLOW RAIL

An extremely shy, 7-inch-long marshbird that sports a short tail and stubby yellow bill. Rarely seen because it runs through marsh vegetation to escape, rather than flying.

Habitat and range: East of Missouri River. Prefer fens, or groundwater-fed wetlands, that support diverse plant and animal life. Birds lay 8-10 eggs under a canopy of grasses.

Why: The rail is of particular concern because its preferred habitat, fens, are sensitive and easily converted to cropland. If a fen is destroyed, it takes 10,000 years for it to form again naturally.



USFWS

Horned grebe



Chris Grondahl

White pelican



Chris Grondahl

American bittern



Craig Bihre

Swainson's hawk

*photo not
available*

Ferruginous hawk



John Clem

Yellow rail



Willet



Upland sandpiper



Long-billed curlew



Marbled godwit



Wilson's phalarope



Franklin's gull

WILLET

Although a rather dull gray when standing, its striking black and white wings are obvious in flight. At 15 inches long, it's a relatively large shorebird. Particularly gregarious during breeding season, willets can be very vocal, bellowing a piercing *pill-will-willet* if threatened.

Habitat and range: Statewide, with heavy densities in Missouri Coteau and drift prairie. Use a variety of wetland types and nest in uplands, preferably native prairies away from water.

Why: Loss, destruction, or degradation of both wetland and prairie habitat is negatively affecting this species.

UPLAND SANDPIPER

A medium-sized shorebird, with a short, yellow bill, long yellow legs, small head, long, slender neck, and a long tail. Commonly seen standing on wooden fence posts in pastures.

Habitat and range: Statewide. Although classified as a shorebird, is almost always found in dry, open mixed-grass prairie.

Why: Upland sandpipers prefer native prairie, which is at risk because of conversion, destruction and degradation.

LONG-BILLED CURLEW

The largest shorebird in North America, 26 inches from tail to tip of its long, down-curved, 8-inch bill. Overall, a buffy color, but striking, pink-cinnamon underwings visible in flight.

Habitat and range: West of Missouri River, most likely limited to extreme southwest counties. Nest in short-grass prairie or grazed mixed-grass prairie.

Why: Curlews numbered much higher during the 1800s, and were more widely distributed. Population is declining nationwide from loss of short-grass breeding habitat and other factors on wintering grounds in western Mexico.

MARBLED GODWIT

The largest godwit in North America. It is buff-brown, with barring underneath, sports a long, up-turned, flesh-colored bill with a dark tip, and orangish underwings distinctive in flight. Cries *godWHIT, godWHIT* and will fly to meet intruders if feeling threatened.

Habitat and range: Statewide, with high densities in Missouri Coteau. Uses a variety of wetlands, streams or lakes. Nests generally on native prairie, often heavily grazed.

Why: Although fairly common in North Dakota, historically it was even more so. Loss and destruction of prairie breeding habitat, along with diminishing wintering grounds, negatively affect this species.

WILSON'S PHALAROPE

Small shorebird for which sex roles are reversed. Females are brightly colored, with a brown-red and gray back, black streak from eyes down to a light cinnamon neck, and a white throat and belly. Males are light gray and white.

Habitat and range: Statewide. Most often seen feeding in shallow wetlands or mudflats, sometimes spinning to churn up food. Nest in grass on the margins of wetlands where the male tends the nest.

Why: Winters as far south as southernmost tip of South America, phalaropes face many challenges during long migration. In addition, loss of breeding habitat is a concern.

FRANKLIN'S GULL

A common gull. The most distinguishing characteristics are its black head and large white spots on black tips of wings.

Habitat and range: East of Missouri River, with high densities around Devils Lake area. Colonial nesters that build nests of dead marsh plants, which float on water or attach to reeds. These gulls are often seen following tractors working fields, eating easy meals of worms and insects forced to the surface.

Why: Franklin's gull is a "responsibility" species as North Dakota hosts perhaps one of the largest breeding colonies in the world. Nearly 25,000 nesting pairs have been counted at Lake Alice National Wildlife Refuge.

BLACK TERN

Compared to gulls, terns are smaller and much more graceful in air. Black terns are nearly all black, except for gray wings and white undertail.

Habitat and range: East of Missouri River. Use a variety of wetlands with emergent vegetation. Semi-colonial nesters that also use floating nests. Commonly seen hovering over water and then diving to catch small fish or insects.

Why: Tern population is linked, and is highly sensitive, to water availability. Loss of wetlands negatively affects this species, especially during dry years.

BLACK-BILLED CUCKOO

Truly a unique species in that it is not closely related to any other birds. A slender, long-tailed bird, brown upperside and off-white underneath. A bold, red orbital eye ring is obvious in adults.

Habitat and range: Statewide, particularly the Turtle Mountains and along the Sheyenne River. An inconspicuous bird that moves quickly through woodlands, thickets, prairie shrubs, shelter-belts, and wooded areas of towns. Favorite food is caterpillars.

Why: Cuckoos across the country have been declining for 20 years. Downward trend is continuing due to loss and degradation of riparian habitats.

SPRAGUE'S PIPIT

A slender, rather dull, light brown, sparrow-like bird that wears a "necklace" of fine streaks. Features an undulating flight when flushed. Males have a territorial flight display that can last three hours.

Habitat and range: Statewide, except Red River Valley. An extremely secretive bird, it prefers extensive tracts of ungrazed or lightly-grazed prairie.

Why: Declining due to loss and degradation of prairie habitat. It also has a restricted breeding range in North America, limited primarily to Montana, North Dakota and central Canada, making this a "responsibility" species.

GRASSHOPPER SPARROW

Short-tailed and flat-headed, this sparrow is yellowish, with an unstreaked breast. Of note is a yellow spot between the eyes and bill. Named because of its grasshopper-like *tik tuk tikeeeeeeeez* call.

Habitat and range: Statewide. A characteristic prairie sparrow that uses idle or lightly-grazed mixed-grass prairie, meadows and hayfields. Nests on ground.

Why: Loss, destruction, or degradation of prairie habitat is negatively affecting this species.

BAIRD'S SPARROW

Distinguishing characteristics include a narrow band of fine, dark streaks along with dark spots on neck. Its song is a musical *zip-zip-zip-zr-r-r*.

Habitat and range: Statewide, less common in the Red River Valley. Native mixed-grass prairie is preferred by this ground-nesting bird.

Why: Declining due to loss and degradation of prairie habitat. It also has a restricted breeding range in North America, limited primarily to Montana, North Dakota, and central Canada, making this a "responsibility" species.

NELSON'S SHARP-TAILED SPARROW

Sports a bright, yellow face and throat, finely-streaked breast, gray nape and crown, and pronounced white belly. Its song is similar to Le Conte's sparrow, but softer and airier *pl-teshhhhhh-ush*.

Habitat and range: East of Missouri River. Preferred habitat is fens, but also uses shallow marsh zones of wetlands and lakes.

Why: Loss of wetlands through draining, filling, or other destruction and degradation is biggest threat.



Ed By

Black tern

photo not
available

Black-billed cuckoo

photo not
available

Sprague's pipit

Photo not
available.

Grasshopper sparrow



Chris Gendahl

Baird's sparrow



Craig Birle

Nelson's sharp-tailed sparrow

photo not
available

Lark bunting



Craig Birle

Chestnut-collared longspur

photo not
available

Canadian toad



Chris Grondahl

Plains spadefoot toad



Chris Grondahl

Smooth green snake



Chris Grondahl

Western hognose snake

LARK BUNTING

At first glance, appears to be a blackbird. Males are all black, except for broad patches of white on wings and tips of the tail. Females are gray-brown, with messy dark streaks on the breast.

Habitat and range: Statewide, but less common in the Red River Valley. Sagebrush or sage prairie is preferred by this species. Secondarily use mixed-grass prairie interspersed with shrubs such as wolfberry and western rose.

Why: Loss, destruction, or degradation of prairie habitat is negatively affecting this species.

CHESTNUT-COLLARED LONGSPUR

As its name implies, this bird has a chestnut collar. Males have a black belly, creamy, yellow throat, and black and white on top of head. Females are a duller brown. Sports a conspicuous black triangle on a white tail.

Habitat and range: Statewide, rare in Red River Valley. Preferred habitat is grazed or hayed mixed-grass prairie, as well as short-grass prairie.

Why: Sheer abundance of this species in pre-settlement times was astonishing. Although still fairly common in North Dakota, loss of native prairie habitat continues to reduce once great numbers.

CANADIAN TOAD

This medium-sized nocturnal toad of about 2-3 inches varies in color from green to brownish-red. Brown or red warts present on back, which also features a light line running down the middle. Also known as Dakota toad.

Habitat and range: East of Missouri River. A rather aquatic toad, using margins of lakes, ponds and a variety of wetlands.

Why: North Dakota comprises the southern portion of its limited range. Vulnerable in the United States, although secure in Canada.

PLAINS SPADEFOOT TOAD

A toad with smooth grayish or brown skin, and a distinctive cat-like eye. It puffs up when threatened to look bigger and tougher, but also to make it look harder to swallow.

Habitat and range: Western two-thirds of the state. Inhabit dry grasslands with sandy or loose soil in which it burrows up to 2 feet. Emerges during summer evenings after a heavy rain to breed in shallow pools.

Why: A vulnerable species in most of its northern range where open grasslands are at risk of destruction and degradation.

SMOOTH GREEN SNAKE

Colored bright green with a white belly, this well-camouflaged, 12-22-inch snake blends perfectly in green grass.

Habitat and range: Statewide, except for extreme southwest North Dakota. Primarily inhabits grasslands, particularly uplands of hills. One of only a handful of snakes that is entirely insectivorous, feeding on grasshoppers, crickets and caterpillars.

Why: Little is known about this reclusive snake. Habitat destruction, along with threats to its prey from pesticides, makes it vulnerable.

WESTERN HOGNOSE SNAKE

Sometimes confused with rattlesnakes, the hognose is tan to yellowish-gray, with dark blotches, and an upturned nose for shoveling into loose soil. If threatened, it may fake death by flipping on its back, letting its forked tongue hang loose. If turned on its stomach, it will again flip onto its back.

Habitat and range: Statewide, except for northwestern North Dakota. Typically found in sandy or gravelly habitats, often by rivers.

Why: In North Dakota, faces threats to its habitat, as well as threats from humans who misidentify them as rattlesnakes and kill them out of fear.

BLACK-TAILED PRAIRIE DOG

North Dakota's largest ground squirrel has a tan coat, with a black-tipped tail. With front feet designed for burrowing, prairie dogs live in towns comprised of a system of tunnels.

Habitat and range: Exclusively west of Missouri River. Prefer short grass of grazed rangeland in southwestern North Dakota.

Why: Once prolific on the prairie, their numbers have been reduced throughout much of their range in North Dakota. An important species to the plains, providing burrows for shelter, and serve as food for many other species.



Harold Umber

Black-tailed prairie dog

STURGEON CHUB

Member of minnow family that grows to 3 inches. Green-brown above, with large brown spots. Snout extends beyond upper lip. Similar to sicklefin chub, except fins are straight edged.

Habitat and range: Most commonly found in Little Missouri River, but present in Missouri River and tributaries. Found mostly in large turbid rivers, with sand or gravel bottoms.

Why: Native to North Dakota, but now appears in low numbers. Suitable habitat lost to dams and channelization threatens this species.

*photo not
available*

Sturgeon chub

SICKLEFIN CHUB

Member of minnow family that grows to 4 inches. Light green to brown on back, with many brown and silver spots. Large, sharp sickle-shaped fins. Caudal fin is black, with a white edge. Long barbels in corners of mouth.

Habitat and range: Recorded in Little Missouri and Yellowstone rivers. Prefers larger, turbid rivers, with gravel or sand bottoms.

Why: Probably North Dakota's rarest fish. A federal candidate species. Loss of free-flowing river sections due to dams and channelization are the greatest threats to this species.

*photo not
available*

Sicklefin chub

PEARL DACE

Member of minnow family that grows up to 6 inches. Dark olive color on top, with darker stripe along back. Silver sides, with a combination of red, yellow and white on belly. May have black and brown specks on sides.

Habitat and range: Recorded in both Missouri and Red River systems. Typically found in pools. Avoids swifter main currents

Why: Rare to North Dakota. Little is known of its status in the state.



Konrad Schmidt

Pearl dace

BLUE SUCKER

Long, slender fish up to 3 feet long. Blue-black on top, growing lighter closer to belly. Fin on back starts in the middle and extends nearly to tail. Relatively small head for body size.

Habitat and range: Found in Missouri River and parts of Yellowstone River. Prefers swift current of large, turbid rivers in areas with rocky or gravel bottoms.

Why: Rare in North Dakota. Its main threat is habitat lost due to damming and channelization of Missouri River System.



ND Game and Fish Dept.

Blue sucker